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ABSTRACT

The harp as a symbol of the Irish people is discussed. The first part of the paper discusses the early use of the harp in Irish society and how the magical powers of this instrument affected the natives and invaders of the small island for centuries. From the time of the Celtic occupation of Ireland in 500 BC, music played by harpers has been associated with ancient warfare and with banquets and ceremonious occasions, e.g., song-loving poets accompanied by harpists could stop confrontations on the Celtic battlefield, and the Irish Parliament traditionally had a banquet with music after the business of the day was completed. The harp as a distinctive symbol of Ireland was introduced on the coinage by Henry VIII around 1526. As the feudal system declined and the influence of the English grew, harps were no longer heard in the banquet halls. The last of the wandering harpers died in the 18th century. The second part of the paper describes several Irish harps and examines their construction. Illustrations are provided. The paper concludes with a bibliography. (RM)

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THE HARP

The Symbol of Ireland

by

Donna Dee Hardy

Shippensburg University

May 1985

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R. B. Armstrong

THE HARP

The Symbol of Ireland

"Three men there are of same regard:

A king, a harper, and a bard."

from an ancient British Bardic Triad
(Rench 1950: Intro to Section I)

The Irish harp has maintained a unique position in the hearts of the Irish people for many centuries. The early use of the harp in the Irish society and the magical powers of this instrument affected the natives and invaders of this small island for centuries. Perhaps Ireland maintained its singular identity because of its distance from central Europe. While Ireland did not suffer an invasion from Rome, it did see many other invaders on its shores. However, much of the ancient history was not disturbed.

According to Oral, the earliest inhabitants came from Scotland around 6000 BC and founded settlements in northern Ireland. Due to little information about these people, archeologists date them as living in the Mesolithic or the Middle Stone Age because of the implements that they left behind. Following them were the New Stone Age or Neolithic men, who were small, dark-skinned people coming to the shores about 5000 BC. This unique stone work and the monuments are still being discovered today. Their artistic skills were noted in their work with metals, copper and gold which they had removed from the land.

The successors to the Neolithic men and women were the Celts. These people occupied central and western Europe before the time of Christ (Place 1977: 10). Their culture began in the area of Switzerland about 500 BC and is called Le Téne by archeologists who have found remnants of their culture. Beautiful silver cauldrons, torcs (worn around the neck), and coins minted approximately 300 BC have been recovered. Their Celtic artwork displays abstract, geometric patterns, and sacred animals and birds (1977: 11).

The Celts had such a strong appearance that the Romans remarked how terrifying they were to oppose in battle. "They are boasters and threateners and given to bombastic self-dramatization..." (Rimmer 1969:11). The men soaked their hair in a chalk mixture that made the hair resemble a horse's mane. Cu Chulainn, a hero of many Celtic folk tales, was described as having hair that was "dark at the roots, red in the middle, and golden yellow at the ends" (Place 1977: 14). The mustaches of the Celts were very unkept in appearance and basically unsanitary because of food particles. Like the men, the Celtic women were also quite tall and strong with braided or long flowing hair. They used fruit juices to put color on their lips and cheeks. Also, they adorned themselves with jewelry.

History tells us that the Celts were many tribes that frequently warred with each other. The tribes were headed by a chief and religious leaders. These men were also the lawgivers learning the laws and passing them on through their oral tradition. The Celts "... are quick of mind and with a good natural ability for learning. They also have lyric poets whom they call Bards" according to Diodorus Siculus (Rimmer 1969: 11). The Druids or priests, also known as religious leaders, trained the Bards in the rudiments of history, oratory, and laws. This was taught through their poetry. Those who specialized in the preservation of the ancient traditions were the "senchaid" who were part of the poets or filids. This system came through the druids or bardic caste which finds a similar system in India. "[Celtic] laws, [Celtic] systems of physics, and other sciences were poetical compositions and set to music, which was always esteemed the most polite part of learning amongst them" (Walker 1818: 11).

Their transmission of the literature in an oral manner was analyzed by Finnegan. He looked closely at the term "oral" and the criterion used by scholars. This concept was analyzed in terms of (1) its composition, (2) its mode of transmission, and (3) (related to (2)) its performance " notwithstanding some of the sources for the plots and language including written material (Place 1977: 17). A work may be composed both before and during a performance presented orally. Also, a work may be composed both before and during a performance with modifications made later. "Indeed it is sometimes hard to draw any very clear line of principle between the kind of mental composition sometimes engaged in by a literate poet, only later committing his words to

writing, and that of the ...mediaeval Irish poet" (1977: 17). The interpretation of oral transmissions is frequently considered by anthropologists as unchanged words over a period of time:

> ...with oral poetry it makes a real difference whether a poem is normally delivered in say a remote and uplifted style, as of a seer receiving his words direct from divine inspiration and aware of his spiritual source rather than his occasion when the mood of delivery is likely to match that of the audience...(1977:123).

Through historical fiction the history of Ireland has been preserved. Since one finds a blending of history and mythology in the historical tales, a separation of the two cannot be determined. For example,

> [t]he earliest figure is Labraid Loingsech, supposed to have been king of Leinster in the third century BC, hero of The Destruction of Dinn Rig. The latest is Brian Borama, High King of Ireland 1002-1014 (Dillon 1975:2).

As their history and mythology have been blended in Irish history, both poetry and music have been blended also. They both come from the same "inspirational fountain" (Dabney 1901:15). As the music and poetry mesh and the song moves from one person to another, it remains unchanged in meaning while being coloured by each person in turn (Gwynn 1920:52). There is a uniqueness created when the Irish language is combined with music. Vallancey states that the Irish language softens harsh consonants, making it most suitable for music (Walker 1818: 88). Aloys Fleischmann points out that in the lives of the ancient Irish music played a significant role.

Music has been associated "with banquets and ceremonious occasions, warfare, the casting of spells, and harpers figure in many of the legends" (1952: 1). As to the type of music played by these harpers, there is no concrete evidence. The long panegyrical poems recited or sung appear to some scholars, too complex to be able to sustain a musical setting as we believe may have been required at that time.

The poetry of the Bards gives strong suggestions of the nature of the Irish people. Walker says

> ...the remarkable susceptibility of the Irish of the passion of love, a passion, which the munificent establishments of the Bards left them at liberty freely to indulge. While the mind is enduring the torments of hope, fear, or despair, its effusions cannot be gay....

> The subject of these (their songs) is always love; and they seem to understand poetry to be designed for no other purpose than to stir up that passion in the mind (1818: 185).

One performance practice of poetry described as existing in County Mayo, Ireland, even into the eighteenth century, has the first or important part of the verse presented in a chanted monotone with melodic inflections in the cadences sung in psalmody style, with the harp giving the basic chordal support (Fleischmann 1952:1).

The ancient Celts, who were known as a fighting society, used trumpets during the battle at Telemon in 225 BC. There are accounts of their singing songs of victory as they carried off their booty. Also, during the battle, the song-loving poets could stop the fighting which was evidence that barbarians yielded to the power of music:

> In the celebrated contention for precedence between Fin and Goll, near Fin's palace, at Almhain, the attending bards, observing the engagement to grow very sharp, were apprehensive of the consequence, and determined, if possible, to cause a cessation of hostilities. To effect this, they shook the Chain of Silence, and flung themselves amongst the ranks, extolling the sweets of peace, and the achievements of the combatants' ancestors. Immediately both parties, laying down their arms, listened with attention to the harmonious lays of their bards, and in the end, rewarded them with precious gifts. This circumstance has been celebrated in an ancient legend, called, Bruigean beag na h'Almhuine (Walker 1818: 86).

The role of the harp was not limited to stopping confrontations on the battlefield such as at Almhain. Other events included music as a source of peace and serenity. It was traditional in the days of the Irish Parliament to have a banquet with music after the business of the day was completed. This Parliament, otherwise known as Feis, periodically met at Tara in County Meath until St. Ruadhan cursed it in 560 AD. After that the harp was never heard in Tara's Halls, but these celebrations inspired (Rensch 1950:20):

THE HARP THAT ONCE THROUGH TARA'S HALLS

The harp that once through Tara's halls
The soul of music shed,
Now hangs as mute on Tara's walls
As if that soul were fled.
So sleeps the pride of former days,
So glory's thrill is o'er,
And hearts that once beat high for praise,
Now feel that pulse no more!
(Bowen 1974:137)

This gentle power of music was seen as a method to transform by habit the nature of man. "If a man, naturally rough...becomes softened for the time, by music; if those times are continually renewed, habit will take place of nature, and that man's character will, to a certain degree, change" (Walker 1818: 86). Women were interested in cultivating both the arts of music and poetry. Even though most of the Bards were men, there also were women Bards. They saw the powers of these arts as ways to soften the manner of people who were frequently described as ferocious.

The magical powers of music are noted by the historian Dr. Keating, who is thought to have died prior to 1644. He asked the question, who is responsible for the magical music which quiets the worries and concerns of man and answers:

Tadhg O'Cobthaigh of the beauteous form,
The chief beguiler of women,
The intelligent concordance of all difficult tunes,
The thrill of music and of harmony (Armstrong 1969: 22).

Being beguiling was not always the nature of the women:

...we often find them guiding in secret the helm of the state, and proving the primary cause of great revolutions. While embattled ranks waited the arrival of expected invaders, women often walked through the lines, animating the soldiery with suitable warsongs, accompanying their voices, at the same time, with Cruits, or portable harps, such as the Hebrews bore when they danced before the ark (1969: 28-29).

Whiteclad Celtic women also greeted their returning Celtic troops by playing small harps and singing songs of praise, hailing their heroes. This practice was not extraordinary among the Celts.

Even though women fulfilled certain roles as harpists, according to Milligan, the art of playing the harp was primarily for males who used a particular style called the Welsh pennillion (1967:13). This is when

> [t]he harpist plays an air followed by variations, on the same harmonic pattern; the singer improvises stanzas or takes existing stanzas, extemporizing a kind of descant set against the harp air in both melody and rhythm; the voice must begin after the harp but end with it (Sadie 1980: 64).

The importance of the music was not only evident in the actual performance but in the high quality of the special cases used for protecting the harps. Also, they had a cover which was attractively ornamented and the harps themselves were frequently ornamented with precious stones and gems. When Findabar, Medb's daughter, is courted by Fraech in the story of the Tain, it is stated that he is accompanied by three sons of the harper to the Tuatha De Danann, and they carried their harps in valuable containers:

> This was the condition of their harps. There were bags of the skin of otters about them, ornamented with coral, with an ornamentation of gold and of silver over that, lined inside with snow-white roebuck skins; and these again overlaid with black-gray strips of skin and linen cloths, as white as the swan's coat, wrapped around the strings. Harps of gold, silver and findruine, with figures of serpents, and birds, and greyhounds upon them. These figures were of gold and silver (Milligan 1967:13).

In scanning Irish history and its music, we have briefly considered the history, people, role of men and women, symbolism of the history and mythology, power of music, and the importance of the harp. Even though this is widely known, the early stages of the Irish harp are very difficult to reconstruct. There always has been a great mystery about this instrument. Joan Rimmer suggests two possibilities. During the period between the eighth and twelfth centuries, harps were clearly noted in the regions which had semi-Christianized societies: the British Isles and northern and eastern France. These people seemed to have retained the influences of the early invading Danes, Saxons, and Franks. It is also possible that some Teutonic peoples may have played a small angled harp.

Another theory suggests the adaption of a foreign instrument. Artistic works have shown close links between the Celtic British Isles and the

Christian communities of the near East, particularly Syria and Egypt. These vertical harps were made in such a manner that the thin wood of the sound box, skin belly, and gut strings made the harp portable and light. If this instrument were transported to a cold, damp climate, many physical charges would need to have been made. "In other words, Celtic harps might have originated as insular transformations of a near-Eastern instrument, incorporating certain structural features of robust native lyres, the whole adapted to the climate of north-western Europe" (Rimmer 1969:24).

The Dagda, an ancient Celtic pantheon, claims the first Irish harp. When the Dagda's wife, the goddess Boann, was preparing to deliver her child, the Dagda played his harp to sooth his wife's pains. After the birth he played joyously and then gently for his wife to rest. When she awakened,

> ...she named her sons, in gratitude to her husband and his harp, Goltraighe (crying music), Geantraighe (laughing music) and Suantraighe (sleeping music) (Sherman 1981:35).

Ammianus Marcellinus, a fifth century AD Roman historian, wrote that Celtic bards sang to the lyre accompaniment. There is no description given of the lyre. In the seventh century Venantius Fortunatus, a bishop of Poitiers, wrote:

> Romanus lyra, plaudat tibi barbarus harpa,
> Graecus Achilliaca, crotta Britanna canat.
>
> Translation:
>
> The Romans praise thee with the lyre, the barbarians with the harp, The Greeks with the Achillean lyre, the Britons with the crotta (Rimmer 1969: 22).

The lyra and achilliaca are both lyres. The harpa means lyre, contrary to what one would suspect. As the Germanic peoples used a lyre, the British Celts used the chrotta, a Latinized form for the Irish Crot or Cruit, which is called Rotta on the continent. The various descriptions depict harps of many sizes with various numbers of strings. Milligan's deduction is that the instrument referred to is the harp not the lyre (1967:12). Rimmer also points out that the lyre of the pre-Christian Celts is not the harp of historic Ireland. It is not known when this triangular framed harp evolved or was invented (1969:12).

For centuries the sweetness of the music and its call as a voice of Nature was noticed by visitors and inhabitants of Ireland. In 1185, Giraldus Cambrensis, an ecclesiastic with considerable musical knowledge, made the following account of performers he hears.

> The attention of this people to musical instruments, I find worthy of commendation, in which their skill is beyond comparison superior to that of any nation I have seen. For in these, the modulation is not slow and solemn, as in the instruments of Britain to which we are accustomed, but the sounds are rapid and precipite, yet, at the same time, sweet and pleasing.... in such precipitate rapidity of the fingers, the musical proportions are preserved, and by their art faultless throughout; in the midst of their complicated modulations, and most intricate arrangement of notes, by a rapidity so sweet, a regularity so irregular, a concord so discordant, the melody is rendered harmonious and perfect, whether the chords of the diatessaron (the fourth), or diapente (the fifth) are struck together; yet they always begin in a soft mood, and end in the same, that all may be perfected in the sweetness of delicious sounds. They enter upon, and again leave, their modulations with so much subtlety and the tinklings of the small strings sport with so much freedom under the deep notes of the bass, delight with so much delicacy, and soothe so softly, that the excellence of their art seems to lie in concealing it (Armstrong 1969: 11-12).

During the years of 1154-1189, Johannes Brompton, the Abbot of Jereval in Yorkshire, described two kinds of harp styles used by the Irish. One style was to be bold and rapid, and the other, soft and soothing: "...the Irish make music on two kinds of musical instruments, although headlong and rapid, nevertheless sweet and pleasant, the modulations crisp, and the small notes intricate" (Armstrong 1818: 10). The training was done secretly and the lessons were committed to memory.

From the twelfth century through the fourteenth century, the harpers enjoyed a high reputation in Europe. In the thirteenth century, Dante noted that the Irish harps were well-made, abundant, and heard for many years. He also noted that the harp was on the Irish coat of arms, public buildings, coins and stone crosses. "The harp as a distinctive symbol of Ireland was introduced on the coinage by Henry VIII around 1526" (Cuthbert 1975: 235). In the ninth and tenth centuries, depictions of the harps were on the stone

crosses at Kells, Clonmacnoise, Kinitty, Ullard, South East Cross Monasterboice, Durrow, and Castle Dermot. One must realize that the clarity is permanently worn from these crosses:

> On the crosses at Killamery, Kinitty, and on the West Cross at Kells and the Cross of the Scriptures at Clonmacnoise the instruments, although worn, all appear to be round-topped lyres.... The musicians in the last Judgment scenes on the east faces of the tenth-century Muiredeach's Cross at Monasterboice may have another significance, that of the Last Trump and the music of the Blessed and the Damned.... The oblique lyre of Muiredeach's cross appears also in the scene at the top of the east face of the South Cross at Kells, which shows the miracle of the Loaves and Fishes plus a lyre-playing figure at the left....The remaining stringed instruments on the Irish crosses, that is on the South and North Crosses at Castledermot and one of the Ullard crosses, all of about the ninth or tenth centuries, seem to be harps, but they are of a type whose outline is nearly quadrangular. Of these three, the South Cross at Castledermot is in the best condition (Rimmer 1969: 18-20).

Besides artistic representations, the harp was noted in Irish statutes. In the ancient SENCHUS MOR, there is a reference that is quoted by Bryant, "A harp is the one art of music which deserves nobility, though it does not accompany any other noble rank; it has the nobility of a bo-aire tuisi." In other words, the harp alone had a "nobleness" which was shared with the harpist (1968: 202).

However in 1367, since the Statutes of Kilkenny, the bards were forbidden to enter the Pale and to supply shelter or entertainment to them was an infringement of the law. Bards also suffered under the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, Sir John Stanley. During these times they suffered from the extremes of having their property and belongings confiscated to even being hung.

But S. Milligan noted that the harp was protected:

> ...we note in the Welsh Triads that a harp was not liable to seizure for debt, which accords with the almost universal primitive belief that sacred objects belong to the god concerned, and thus have no intrinsic value. The many instances in folklore of harps that are enchanted, that play by themselves without human hands, mysterious harp music heard in lonely or haunted placed, and, in general, all the enchantment and mysterys that the word "harp" can convey to the modern mind are logical survivals of this earlier belief that the instrument was a sacred or magical thing, and that its sacredness was based on its oracular use (1967: 13).

As the harp was so valuable to have a unique covering, the harpers' fingers and fingernails were also to be protected in a particular manner in

regard to any injury sustained. Their hands were susceptible to injury, thus there was a law to cover this problem. Scherman states that:

> If the top of his finger, from the root of the nail...has been cut off...he is entitled to compensation [for his injured body] and a fine [for his outraged honor], in proportion to the severity of the wound. If the blood has been drawn while cutting his nail off, he is entitled to the fine for blood-shedding for it. If it be from the black circle out that his nail has been taken off him, he is entitled to the same fine as for a white [bloodless] blow. Then there is a quill for him besides, by way of restitution (1981: 36).

As this feudal system declined in Ireland, the chieftains had their castles razed and all of Ireland began to feel the strong arm of the English through Elizabeth, Cromwell and William II. The harps and songs were no longer heard in the banquet halls. As the strong English influence was felt throughout the land, agriculture became important and the bards degenerated into itinerant musicians with harps on their backs. They strolled from one home to another for their survival:

> Sir Porter is thy Lord at home
> To hear a Minstrel's song?
> Or, May I crave a lodging here,
> without offence or wrong? (Walker 1818: 222)

In the last of this group of wandering harpers was O'Carolan, who died in 1738. He was considered a musical genius and was known to many people. Born in 1670, in Nobber in County Westmeath, O'Carolan lost his sight to small-pox at a very young age. When he was twelve, he began his harp studies. He seemed to have a natural sensitivity for the harp, never using a strong hand upon it. O'Carolan had several emotional attachments to a few ladies, who served as sources of inspiration for his compositions. Even the Italians were aware of this skilled harpist and gave him the title of Carolonius. An eminent Italian music-master in Dublin heard of O'Carolan and desired to put O'Carolan's skills to a test. The test proved the abilities of O'Carolan, much to the pleasure of this Italian master:

> ...he singled out an excellent piece of music, and highly in the stlye of the country which gave him birth; here and there he either altered or mutilated the piece, but in such a manner, as that no one but a real judge could make a discovery. Carolan bestowed the deepest attention upon the performer while he played it, not knowing, however, that it was intended as a trial of his skill: and that the critical moment was at hand, which was to determine his reputation forever....the Italian no sooner saw the amendments, than he pronounced Carolan to be a true musical genius (Walker 1818: 314,315).

As history shows many noted harpers and the unique position the harp played in the lives and events of the Irish people, one needs to explore the instrument itself. In some instances the harp and its physical elements are referred to in Irish literature.

Description and construction of several Irish harps

The willow and oak were the two woods used by the Gaelic harp makers. Acceptable instruments could be made by using these woods, but at this time better woods were available. Oak has a tendancy to split whereasin maple was excellent and familiar to the harp makers. History tells us there was a mythological significance attached to these woods. "The Celts worship Zeus, and the Celtic image of Zeus is a tall oak" Maximus Tyrius (Milligan 1967:17). Thus the willow tree was considered sacred and attached closely to Ceridwen, the patroness of poetry and poetic wisdom. It was only natural for this willow wood to be used for the harp. The god, Bran, who later became the owner of Ceridwen's cauldron, from which the Triple Muse was born, was considered by the Bards as being the inventor of their art.

Armstrong describes two different early Irish harps. The smaller ones were used by the churchmen and the larger by harpers. Some of these were to have had two rows of strings, such as in the Dalway harp, This was a practicle solution also because of the tension of the brass strings in the bass and steel in the treble. One would need a very sturdy sounding-board which would have affected the vibration of these strings.

Rench mentions the following features of several early Irish harps. There is a "Sound chest-in the form of a truncated triangle and of about the same

depth throughout,...[s]tring arm (also referred to as the neck or the harmonic curve),...[c]olumn (also referred to as the fore-pillar or bow)-a gracefully curving form,...and [s]trings-of wire; the string holes in the sounding board were reinforced with metal to accomodate wire stringing (1969:89).

In looking at some of the earliest representations of the harp, Myles Dillon and Nora Chadwick describe the west side of the "Cross of the Scriptures" as one of the best examples of the high crosses depicting advanced scriptural iconography (Plate 1). The Cross of Muiredach (Plate II), west side, is a famous wheel-headed Irish cross (1967: 164-165). On the east side is the Last Judgement scene which shows that the "...instrument of the Blessed is an oblique lyre on whose yoke a bird perches. This motif is of great antiquity and can be traced back to the early second millennium BC in Mesopotamia" (Rimmer 1969:20).

At Castledermot, stringed instruments are found on ninth or tenth century Irish crosses. Their instrument outline suggests a quadrangular harp "...with a shallow horizontal bar which is probably a soundbox, a curved "arm" or "neck" ...which rises from one end of the box and over-hangs it. A slender forepillar joins the end of the overhanging curve to the other end of the horizontal part" (1969:20) (Plate III).

One of the earliest examples of the wire-strung harp is found at Trinity College in Dublin. This ancient harp is a noted example (Plate IV, V, and VI) discussed by Armstrong. The sound box is from a solid block believed to be black sallow, with the same wood being used for the harmonic curve. But the fore-pillar has been thought to be of a harder wood (1970:54).

Of the examination of the gelatine tracings of this harp (Plate VII), Armstrong says:

> Both the sounding-board and sides of the box are ornamented by burnt lines, curves, and circles. Here the ornamentation does not appear to have been geometrically accurate, but the designs are most elaborate and varied. It may be concluded that the sounding-board was flat, as it still is at the lower extremity; the rise which is now seen in the centre has been caused by the tension of the strings (p. 56).

The ornamentation of the fore-pillar is believed to have taken place a long time after the harp was made. The design shows a strong Celtic influence with

(Plate VIII) animals resembling wolf-dogs and their bushy tails and clawed feet. Also there seems to be a lion. There are incised lines, oval lines, and dots around these grotesque animal forms (57).

The silver metal work located at the end of the harmonic curve (Plate IX) shows superb craftsmanship. The general appearance of this metal plate is a triangle over a parallelgram. The upper part has a crystal cabochon cut with an oval setting below, leading one to believe a stone had been lost or removed from this opening: "At each of the three angles there are bosses in the form of blackberries, and where the two settings meet, and at either side, are three similar bosses with a plain boss in the center of each. The battlement border and sides are well executed" (58).

In the course of time, this harp has undergone changes (Plate X) not to the pleasure of those historians who wished to have examined the instrument in its original state. However, poor repairing has brought forward the following evidence. The fore-pillar has been lengthened. The Celtic ornamentation of the box has been altered. On the right-hand side of the sounding-board, the original was given additions and changes. It also is believed that the shortest string of the original was 3" while the current string is 2 3/4". The longest original string may have been 25 3/4" while the present longest string is 27 1/2" (60).

Another Irish harp, the Fitzgerald or Dalway Harp (Plate XI) was large and low headed, beautifully "decorated with carved scrolls, birds, animal and human heads, the arms and crest of the Fitzgerald family and the inscription RFG fecit Anno 1275"(Rimmer 1969:76). The fragments of this harp (Plate XII) show the strong interest in artwork on the instruments. The designs on the back of the fore-pillar represent pomegranates and leaves which are enhanced by colour (Armstrong 1904:66).

Two other noted harps are located in the Dublin Museum. The first (Plate XIII) has an Irish goshawk on the top of the pillar. It seemed to have had a brass hand attached to it previously. The second harp (Plate XIV) has large cavities in the back of the box with no sound-holes in the sounding-board. The many "shoes of the strings," which protect the strings (84) are triangular, hanging and in the form of horseshoes. Some are decorated with floral motifs.

One harp at the Belfast Museum carries the date 1654 under the bottom part of the harp. At the upper part of the harmonic curve, there is a fish which resembles a salmon. On the back of the box are the initials EL. Under close observation, the harp seems to have been decorated more than once and the original color was believed to have been blue. It is thought that it was done in 1804, in red with gold shamrocks on the sounding-board and the sides of the upper part of the fore-pillar (Plate XV). "Upon the right-hand side of the box a head is painted in oil-colour. The hair, which is unpowdered, is dressed the fashion of the seventeenth century; the countenance somewhat resembles the portraits of Charles II. This portrait, for it certainly was intended for one, probably formed part of the original ornamentation (85)."

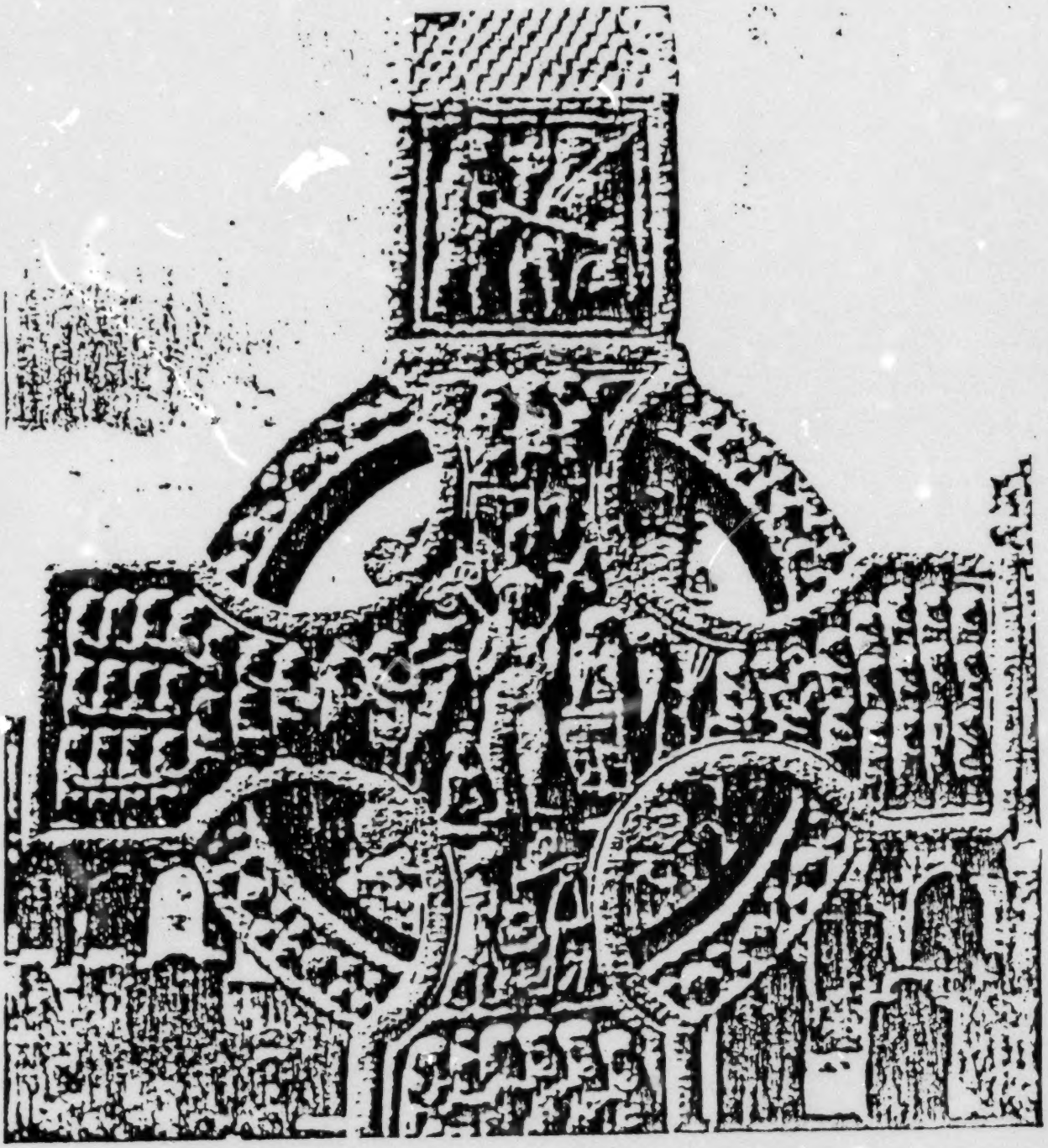
The Buntworth harp is the only harp by John Kelly that is still in existence (Plate XVI). This was a high-headed harp made for the Reverend John Bunworth. The unusual feature of this harp is that the maker, John Kelly, followed the natural bends or irregularities of the wood. This is especially clear on the left side where there is a depression. The "...harp has carved, incised and painted decorations" (Rimmer 1968:75) and a soundboard of a single piece of wood.

During times when these now famous harps and less famous ones were used, noted harpists performed in various places for special events. One place of performance was the Mayoralty-House for King George the Fourth (Plate XVII). Another was the Assembly Rooms in Belfast, where in July 1872, there was an attempt to revive the ancient harp tradition (Plate XVIII). Of the ten harpists playing at this festival, five were blind. Edward Bunting was asked to take notes of this event. As was found out later, he had altered his notes and was not especially skilled to perform this task. However, he did give valuable information regarding this unique festival. The old finger-nail technique of pulling the strings was used only by Denis Hempson, who at this time, was 97 years of age (Cuthbert 1975: 235).

As the magic of music played an important role in the mythology and history of the Irish culture, the harp also was important in the culture as is demonstrated in the literature, music, and historical events. The symbol of this gentle sounding instrument found its way into the hearts of the countrymen as we noted its early use on stone crosses, coinage, literature, and government symbols. The power of the harp symbol is carried out today even on government stationery. Even though

the instrument itself has lost its role as a popular instrument from its first appearance as a fully framed triangular harp in the ninth century, the harp still is a strong reminder to the Irish of their heritage and the influence this lap-stringed instrument had on their ancestors.

Plate I



Last Judgment, East Face of Muiredach's Cross
923 A.D.; Monasterboice, county Louth
Photo by permission of the Commissioners of Public Works in Ireland

Plate II

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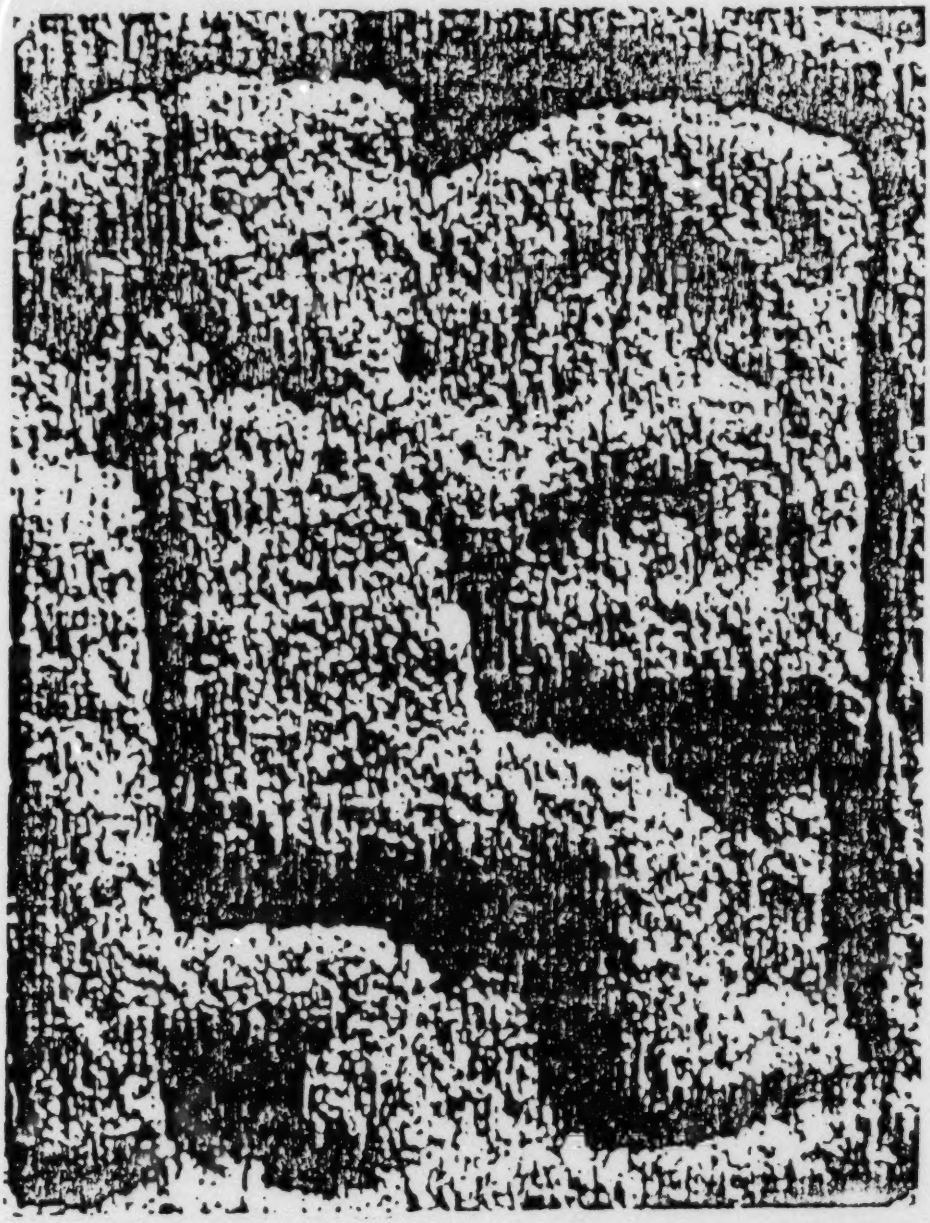
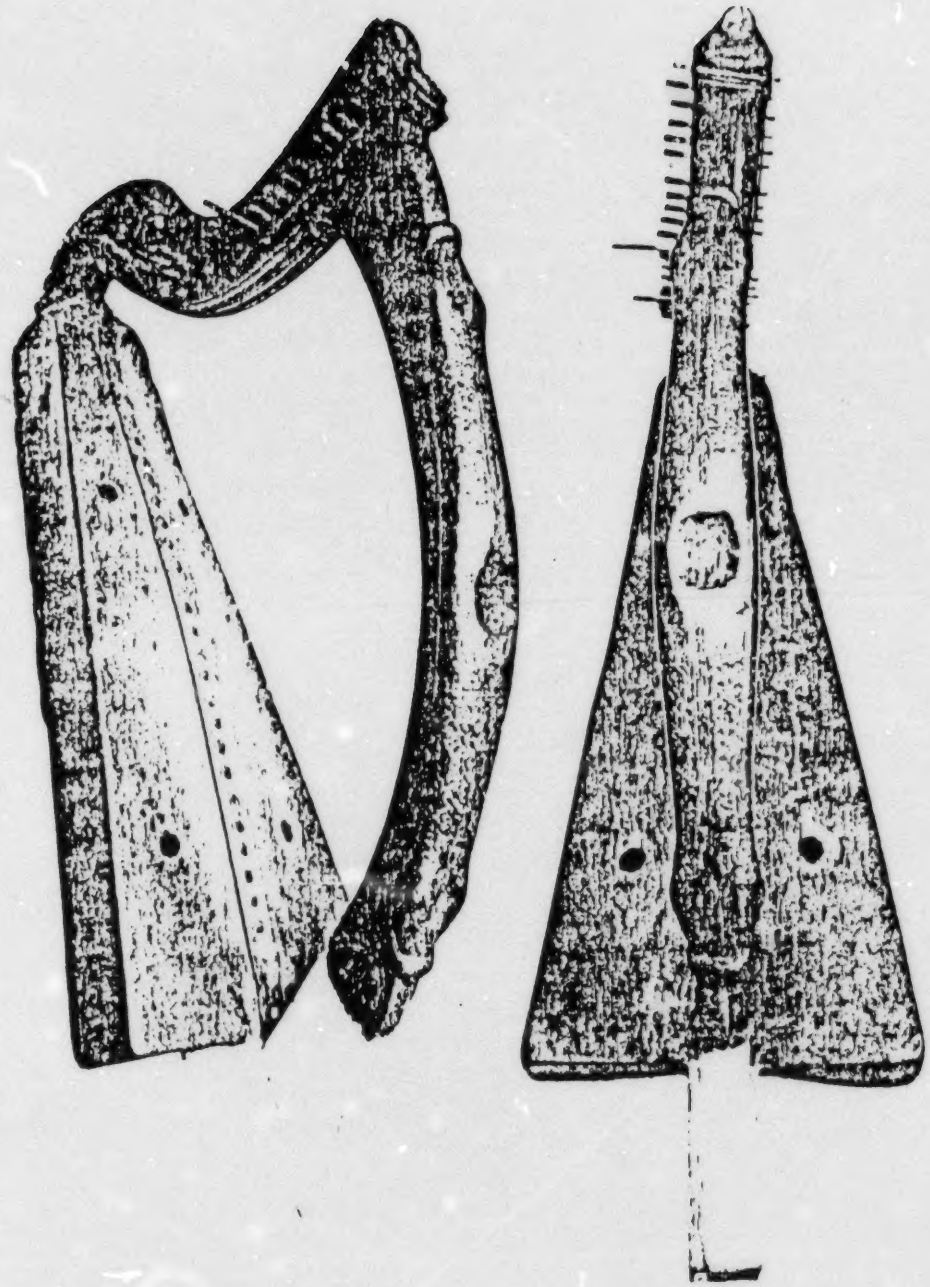


Plate III

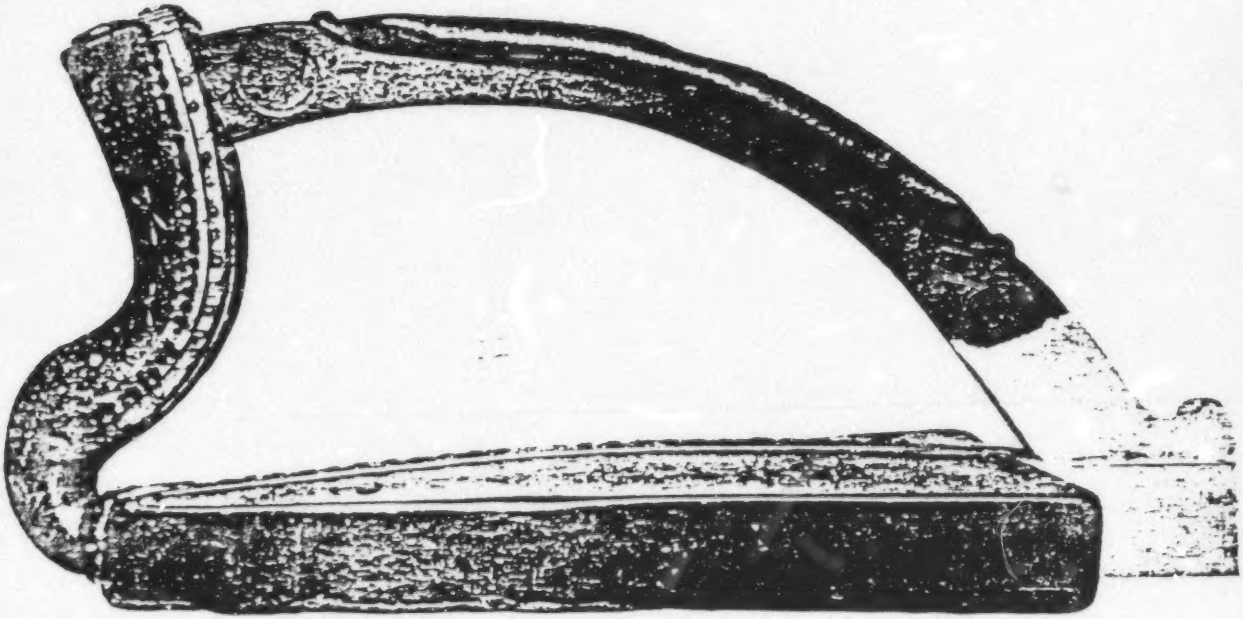


ANCIENT HARP, TRINITY COLLEGE, DUBLIN

Plate IV

ANCIENT HARP, TRINITY COLLEGE, DUBLIN.

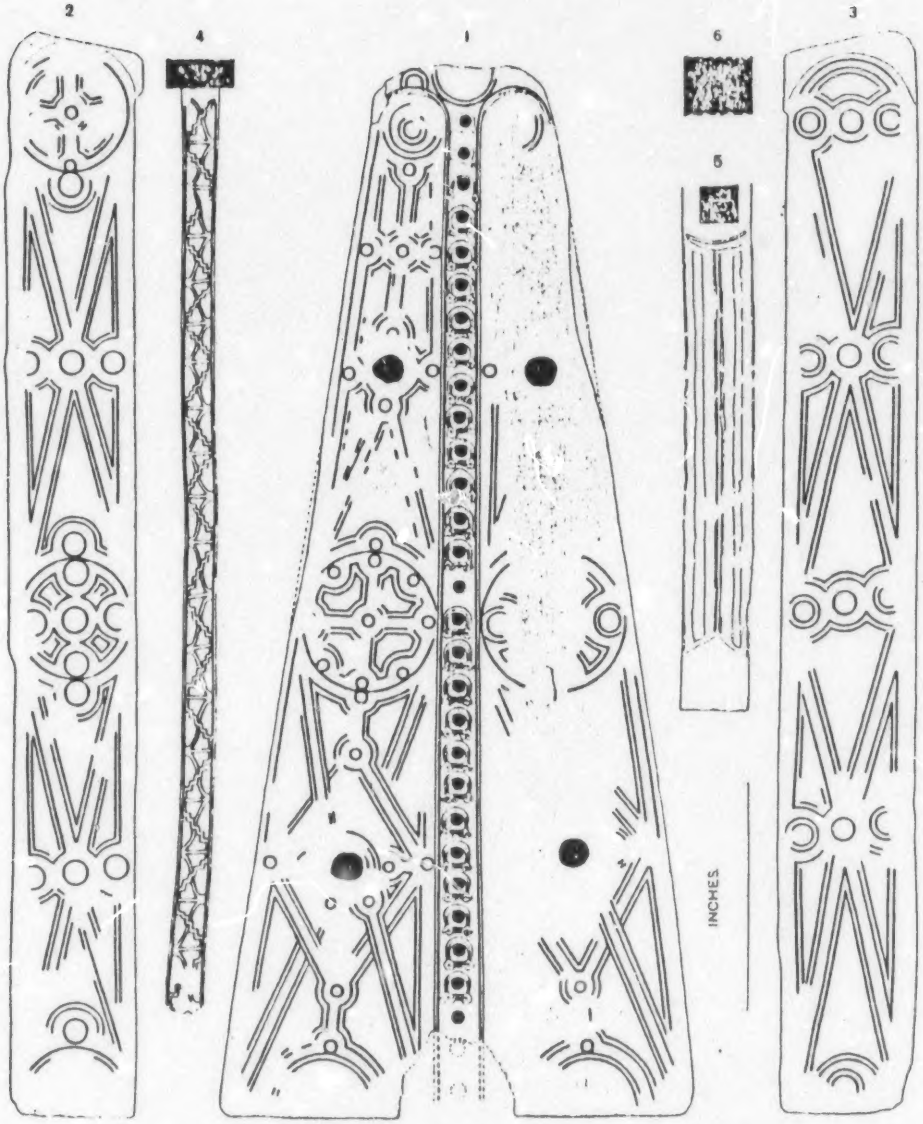
Plate V.



ANCIENT HARP, TRINITY COLLEGE, DUBLIN.

Plate VI

ANCIENT HARP, TRINITY COLLEGE, DUBLIN.



From gelatine tracings and rubbings.

2. Right side of box. 1. Sounding-board. 3. Left side of box.

4. Incised ornament, inner curve of fore-pillar. 5. Moulding under harmonic curve. 6. Section.

Plate VII

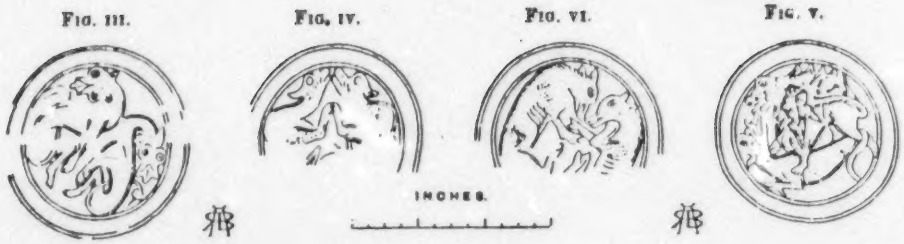


Plate VIII

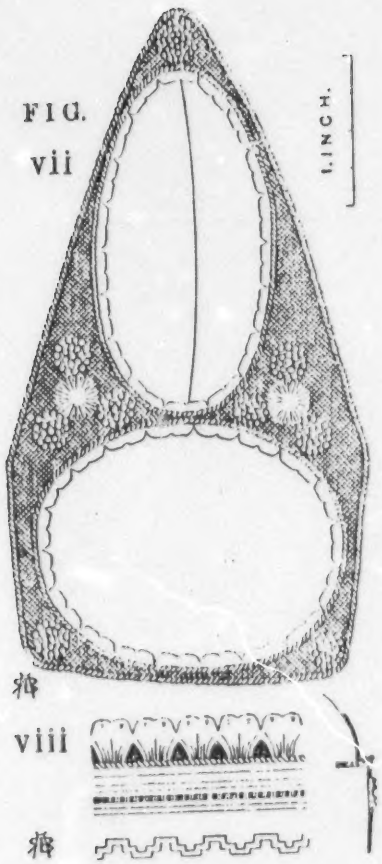
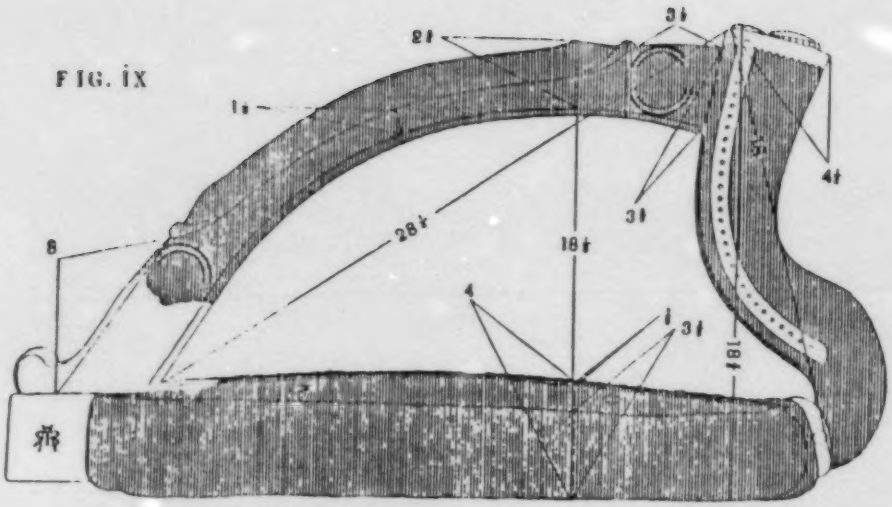


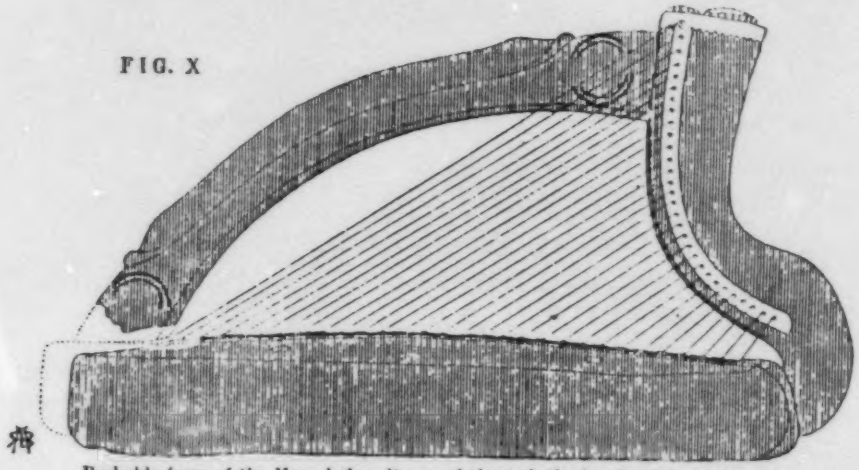
Plate IX

FIG. IX



The Harp in its present distorted state. The measurements are given in inches.

FIG. X



Probable form of the Harp before it passed through the hands of the restorers.

Plate X

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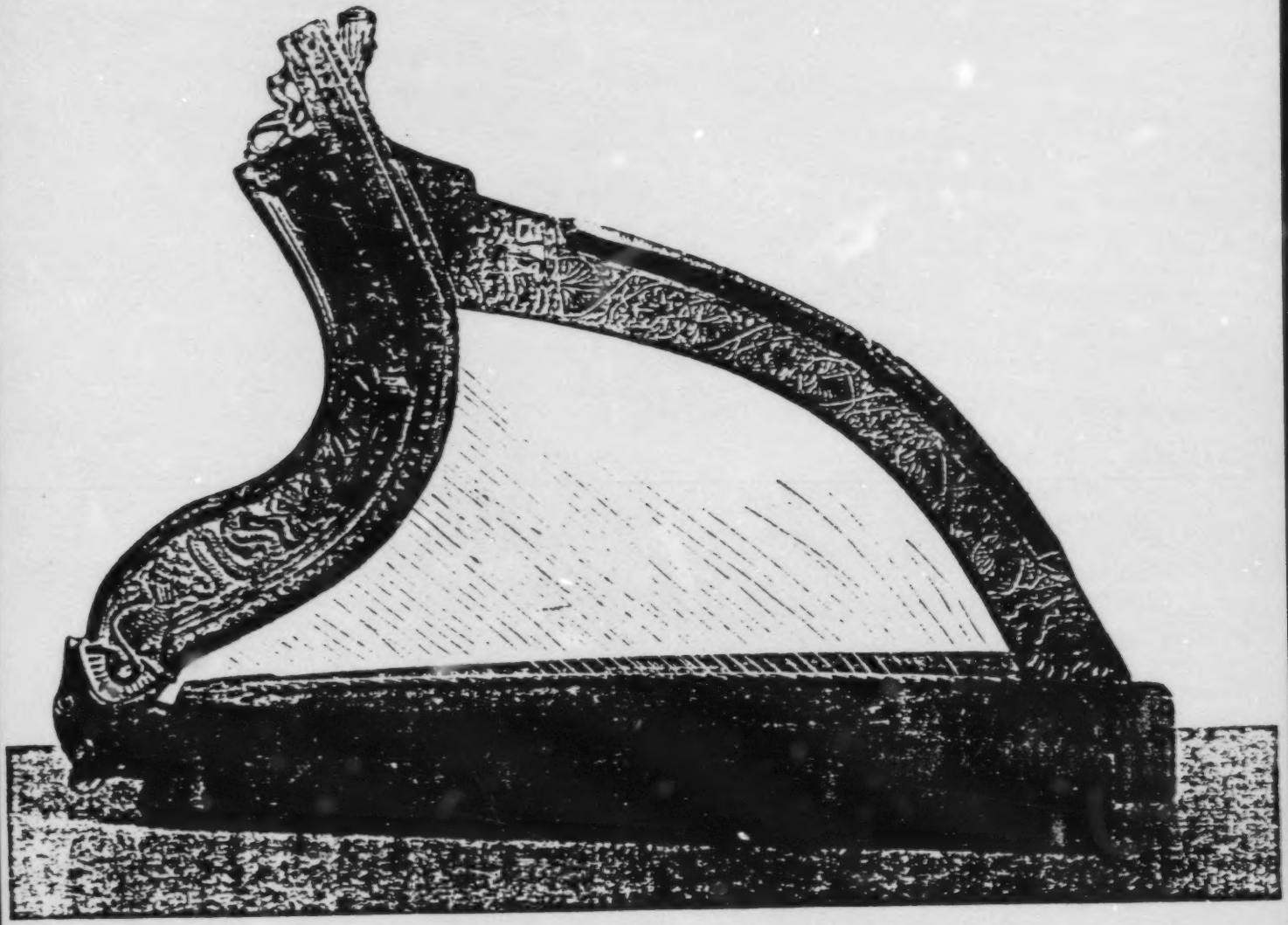

THE FITZGERALD OR DALWAY HARP.

THE RIGHT SIDE OF THE HARMONIC CURVE AND OF THE FORE-PILLAR

THE MISSING PORTION OF THE LATTER AND A PROBABLE BOX SUPPLIED BY R.B.A.

Plate XI

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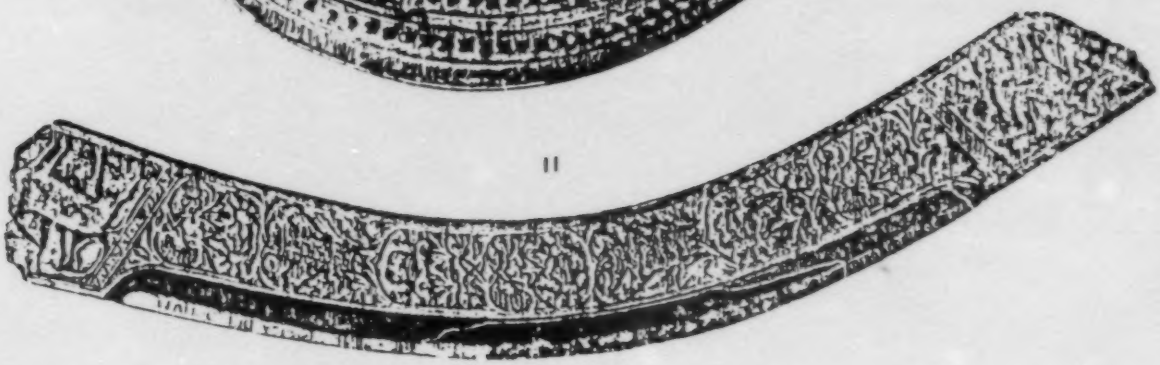
THE FITZGERALD OR DALWAY HARP

I

II



III

Nº I THE RIGHT SIDE OF THE HARMONIC CURVE. Nº II THE RIGHT SIDE OF THE FORE-PILLAR

Nº III THE FRONT OF THE FORE-PILLAR

Plate XII

Plate XIV

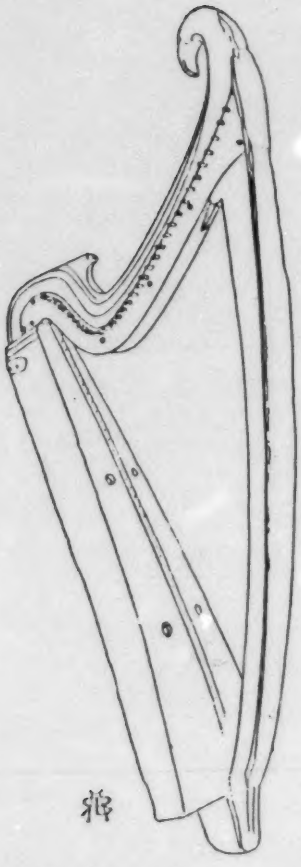


Plate XIII

Plate XVI

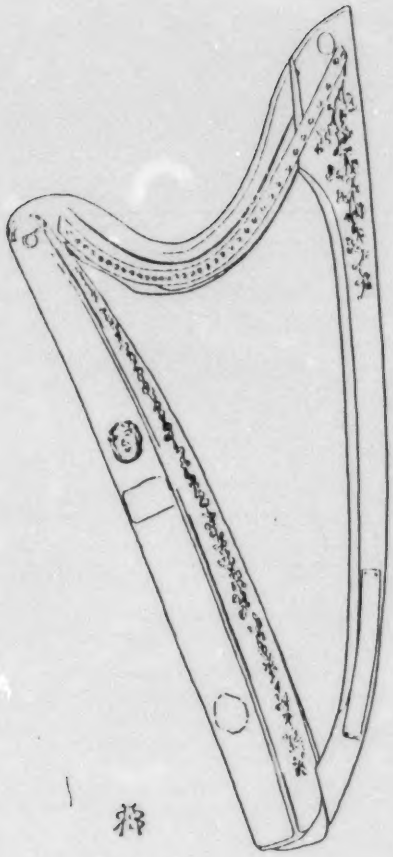


Plate XV

THE FOLLOWING

SELECTION

OF

IRISH MELODIES,

FROM

THE WORKS

OF

THOMAS CONNELLAN, TERENCE CAROLAN,
CHARLES MAC GAURAN, CARROLL O DALY,
AND OTHERS,

Eminent in Lyric Compositions,

HUMBLY OFFERED TO BE PLAYED BEFORE

HIS MOST GRACIOUS MAJESTY

KING GEORGE THE FOURTH,

AT THE MAYORALTY-HOUSE,

BY HIS MOST HUMBLE AND VERY HIGHLY HONORED SERVANTS,

VALENTINE REANNEY, JAMES MAC MONAGAL,
EDWD MAC BRIDE, AND JOHN MAC LOGHLIN,

Irish Harpers.

Plate XVII

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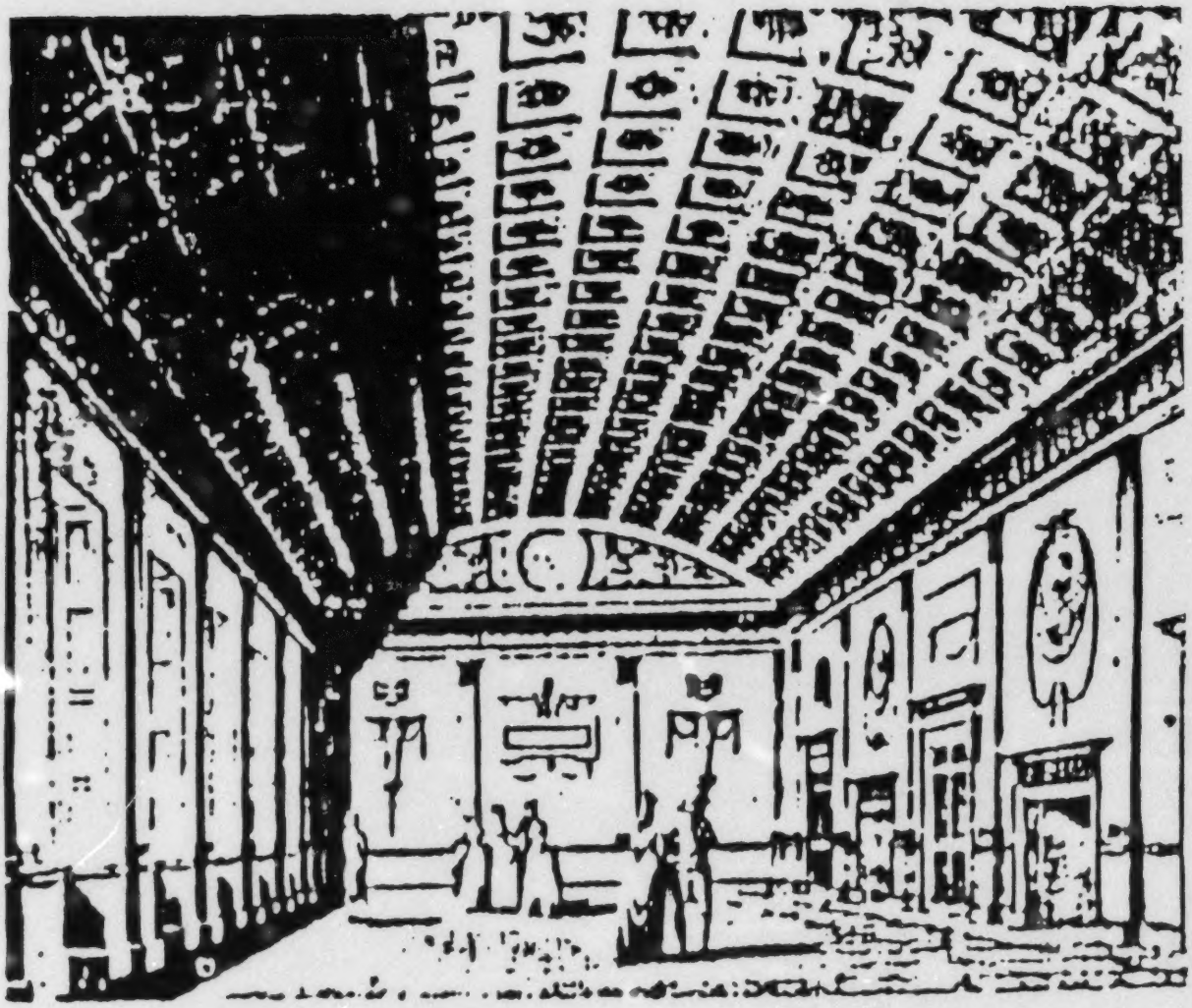

The Assembly Rooms in Belfast, scene of the first Harp Festival July 1792. The building is now the premises of the Northern Bank Limited. (Ulster Museum)

Plate XVIII

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